

# THE SIEGE OF FORT ERIE ❖ ❖

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# THE SIEGE OF FORT ERIE

An Episode of the War of 1812

BY

LOUIS L. BABCOCK

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The campaign of 1814 on the Niagara frontier fully determined that American citizens furnished the choicest materials for an army; that when well disciplined, instructed in the art of war, and led by brave and enterprising generals, they were fully able to meet on equal ground the best English troops.

— *Perkins.*

BUFFALO:  
THE PETER PAUL BOOK COMPANY,  
1899.

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## *Preface.*

One of the most brilliant events of the War of 1812 was the successful defense of Fort Erie by the Americans against the veteran troops of the British. Yet, I dare say, very few residents along the Niagara frontier are aware that within an hour's journey of the city of Buffalo occurred some of the most severe fighting the nation has ever seen, or that the ruined and tottering wall of the old fort, still to be seen, marks the spot where several hundred brave men gave up their lives in desperate struggle.

A period of enforced leisure gave me an opportunity to examine the various authorities bearing upon the siege of Fort Erie, and this sketch grew out of the notes I then made. Undoubtedly errors exist, although considerable pains has been taken to carefully verify each statement. I trust that they will be pardoned and that this sketch may serve to stimulate among a few, at least, the study of the history of the Niagara frontier during this period, than which nothing could be more interesting.

*Buffalo, July 10, 1899.*





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# THE SIEGE OF FORT ERIE:

*An Episode of the War of 1812.*

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## CHAPTER I.

### *A Brief Sketch of Fort Erie up to 1814.*

One of the first travelers who describes the vicinity of Buffalo—the first man, in fact, who appreciated the advantages of the site where Buffalo now stands—was Baron La Hontan, lord lieutenant of the French colony in Newfoundland, who, after paying a compliment to Niagara Falls by describing them as seven hundred or eight hundred feet high, says:

“The Lake Erie is justly dignified with the illustrious name of *Conti*, for assuredly 'tis the finest Lake upon Earth. You may judge of the goodness of the climate from the latitudes of the Countries that surround it. Its circumference extends to two hundred and thirty leagues but it affords everywhere such a charming Prospect that its Banks are deck'd with Oak-Trees, Elms, Chestnut-Trees, Walnut-Trees, Apple-Trees, Plum-Trees, and Vines which bear their fine clusters up to the very top of the Trees upon a sort of ground that lies as smooth as one's Hand. Such ornaments as these are sufficient to give rise to the most agreeable idea of Landscape in the World.”

He describes the locality as abounding in wild game and fish and filled with warlike Indians. In a map annexed to his journal he locates a prospective fort precisely where the city of Buffalo now stands, which he calls Fort Supposé, and advocates the erection of a post, which was never built.

In 1764, Bradstreet, in the course of an expedition against the Indians, saw the necessity of erecting a fortified trading post near where Fort Erie now stands, and wrote Sir William Johnson suggesting that the acquisition of sufficient land for this purpose was desirable. Before the English Crown succeeded in obtaining title to the ground the trading post was abuilding, and subsequent events soon legalized this trespass upon the hunting grounds of the Senecas.

After the collapse of Pontiac's conspiracy, the Senecas, fearing lest the English would punish them for their participation in his scheme, sent some four hundred warriors to Sir William Johnson to sue for peace. And it was about time, for the terrible massacre at Devil's Hole, perpetrated by this tribe, was fresh in the minds of all. This occurred on September fourteenth, 1763, at Devil's Hole, a few miles from Fort Niagara, when an escort to a train of twenty-five wagons on the trail from Fort Schlosser to Fort Niagara was ambushed and almost annihilated by the wily Senecas, only three men escaping. A small garrison of two companies at Lewiston, hearing the attack, rushed to the rescue and was in turn ambushed. All but eight of these were killed. When the garrison from Fort Niagara reached the scene, the ruins of the train, and some eighty scalped bodies, including those of six officers, alone remained. When the Seneca delegation arrived, Sir William, doubtless bearing this and similar events in mind, insisted upon a substantial grant of land. This the Senecas promised to give. Soon afterward they reluctantly met Sir William Johnson at Fort Niagara and by formal treaty the English acquired a strip of land four miles wide on each side of the Niagara from Lake Ontario to Lake Erie. This treaty was concluded on August sixth, 1764.

A clause of the treaty granting this land is here inserted, as it is of considerable local interest. Parkman's graphic description of this gathering of the Indians, in his *Conspiracy of Pontiac*, will well repay a perusal, for the concourse comprised not only the Senecas but upwards of two thousand other Indians. Some,

even, came from west of the Mississippi. The clause of the treaty referred to is as follows:

“ARTICLE FIFTH. In addition to the grant made by the Chenussio Deputys to His Majesty at Johnson Hall in April of the Lands from Fort Niagara to the upper end of the carrying place beyond Fort Schlosser and four miles in breadth on each side of the River the Chenussios now surrender up all the lands from the upper end of the former Grant (and of the same breadth) to the Rapids of Lake Erie to His Majesty for His sole use and that of the garrisons but not as private property it being near some of their hunting grounds so that all that Tract of the breadth before mentioned from Lake Ontario to Lake Erie shall become vested in the Crown in manner as before mentioned excepting the Islands between the Great Falls and the Rapids which the Chenussios bestow upon Sir William Johnson as a proof of their regard *and of their knowledge of the trouble he has had with them from time to time.* All which the Chenussios hope will be acceptable to His Majesty and trust that they may have some token of his favor.”

Sir William promptly granted to the Crown all his rights in the land ceded to him. Porter, in his extremely accurate and interesting *History of Old Fort Niagara*, says:

“This was the first tract of land in the limits of the present Western New York to which the Indian title was absolutely extinguished; and this remarkable land deal, so vast in the amount of territory involved, so beneficial to the whites in the power it gave them for trade and the settlement of the country, and of such enormous subsequent value in view of very recent developments along this frontier, was closed \* \* \* within the historic fortifications of Fort Niagara.”

The ground having been acquired, the post at Fort Erie was soon pressed to completion. A wharf was constructed just above the rapids, and, no doubt, trade actively commenced with the

Indians. Marshall, in his article on the Niagara frontier, describes the post as located at some distance below the remains of the fort now standing. The part facing the river was built of stone surrounded by squared pickets, while the balance was stockaded. He says:

“The foundations of the present fort were laid in 1791. It must have been a rude fortification as originally constructed, for the Duke of Liancourt describes it in 1795 as a cluster of buildings surrounded with rough, crazy palisades destitute of ramparts, covered ways, or earthworks. Outside of the fort were a few log houses for the shelter of the officers, soldiers, and workmen. There was also a large government warehouse with an overhanging story pierced with loopholes for the use of musketry. The stone portion, the ruins of which still remain, was built in 1806, in the form of a quadrangle, and subsequently enlarged to more formidable dimensions. The Indian name of the locality, Gai-gwāāh-gēh, signifies ‘The Place of Hats.’ Seneca tradition relates as its origin that in olden times soon after the first visit of the white man a battle occurred on the lake between a party of French in batteaux and Indians in canoes. The latter were victorious and the French boats were sunk and the crews drowned. Their hats floated ashore where the fort was subsequently built, and, attracting the attention of the Indians from their novelty, they called the locality ‘The Place of Hats.’”

Prior to the beginning of this century the route usually traveled from Niagara Falls to Buffalo Creek was up the present Canadian side of the river to the Black Rock ferry, where the river was crossed near where the ferry now plies. The customary route to Detroit was past Fort Erie and along the northern shore of Lake Erie. The old fort was built by Bradstreet for the security of vessels and to provide a safe place for laying them up in winter, as well as for a trading post. Its early history was apparently too prosaic to have left any trace in the writings of travelers beyond a mere occasional allusion or a meager description.

Christian Schultz, junior, visited Fort Erie in 1807, and describes it as a small post garrisoned by twenty-eight men, who at that time were employed in building new works. He remarks upon the fact that the Americans have no fort or garrison on their side, "although there is a most commanding situation for that purpose." A few days before Schultz visited the post the English had occasion to move one of the guns of the fort. A curious Yankee, after having looked into the bore, went to the breech, and, sighting along the piece, discovered it was pointing directly toward Buffalo. He became enraged, and cursed King George, his officers, and his soldiers with all his ability, and promised to return the next day with a party of his "choice fellows, and if he found the gun in the same position he would hang every mother's son of them without judge or jury." It is probable either that the gun was moved or that the Yankee failed to keep his promise, for the garrison continued to exist.

The fort's sole claim to importance consisted in its location upon the trail along the northern shore of Lake Erie and in the existence of the harbor and the trading place to which it afforded protection. At no time in its history was its possession of great strategical value either to the English or to the Americans.

## CHAPTER II.

*Before the Invasion.*

Benjamin Franklin once remarked that the war of 1776-1783 was the War of the Revolution, but the war of independence still remained to be fought. Events during Jefferson's and Madison's administrations proved the truth of the remark, for the infant nation was vexed and harassed not only by England and France but by the pirates of the Mediterranean and the Indians at home as well. Through the operation of Orders in Council, and the Berlin and Milan Decrees promulgated by both England and France, our commerce, just beginning to flourish, was almost driven from the seas; thousands of our seamen were compelled to serve in British vessels through the infamous practice of impressment; our ships were stopped and searched on the high seas for alleged British subjects or suspected breaches of neutrality; Indians formerly friendly to us were armed and incited to revolt; and these things occurred not once, but many times. Indeed, as Madison put it in his communication to Congress of June first, 1812:

"We behold, in fine, on the side of Great Britain a state of war against the United States, and on the side of the United States a state of peace toward Great Britain."

The United States dreaded hostilities, and Madison would gladly have avoided them, yet there seemed no alternative if we desired to take our place among the nations of the world. Congress accordingly declared war on June eighteenth, 1812, and the next day it was proclaimed by the president.

The declaration of war found the country totally unprepared for hostilities. Our army consisted of barely six thousand men, while our navy was composed of about twenty-five war ships carrying three hundred guns, against the thousand war vessels of



the British. Not only in men and war ships were we lacking, but in munitions of war of every description as well; and to further embarrass the administration, both the Federal Party and the New England states strongly opposed the war, and mass meetings were held and pamphlets continually circulated by the peace party.

The war opened disastrously with the surrender of Detroit by Hull, and, as a result, the loss of the territory of Michigan. During the years 1812 and 1813 nearly all the land operations displayed the incompetency of American commanders and the cowardice of American militia. In short, we were as uniformly unsuccessful on land as we were successful on the sea; and no part of our territory suffered more severely than the Niagara frontier. It is not within the scope of this chapter to recount these defeats or dwell upon the victories—few and far between—which served to hearten up the people.

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Buffalo, then a village of about one hundred and twenty-five houses, was burned by the British and Indians on the thirty-first of December, 1813, and the first of January, 1814. Only one house, a blacksmith shop, and the jail were left standing. Between forty and fifty people of both sexes were killed, stripped to the skin, and scalped by the Canadian Indians accompanying the column.

While the burning of Buffalo was contrary to the laws of war, it was an act of retaliation for the wanton burning of the flourishing village of Newark (now Niagara) situated near Fort George in Canada, consisting of one hundred and fifty houses. This was done by the Americans under General McClure, who acted entirely without orders or any justification or excuse whatever. Doubtless many of the scenes at the burning of Buffalo were only repetitions of those at Newark, as each side was assisted by a large number of Indians, who at such times were uncontrollable. The homeless settlers managed to survive the winter

through assistance afforded by the people of the state, who generously contributed supplies. Money was voted by the Legislature and by various cities, amounting in the aggregate to upwards of fifty thousand dollars.

The dreary winter at last came to a close, and things began to look brighter. A brickyard was put into operation; building was commenced; and, owing to the presence of a considerable body of troops quartered at Buffalo, money was quite plentiful. Johnson, in his *History of Erie County*, is authority for the statement that by May twentieth the village boasted three taverns, four stores, twelve shops, twenty-three houses, and thirty or forty huts, besides many buildings in process of erection.

Along in June rumors of an invasion of Canada began to be current. The force at Buffalo then consisted of two brigades of regulars, the First and Second, under General Winfield Scott and General Ripley respectively, and a portion of one brigade of militia under General Porter, besides about six hundred Senecas. The monthly return of General Brown's division for July first, 1814, was as follows:

	Present for Duty, N. C. O. and Men.	Officers.	Aggregate Present and Absent.
Artillery,	330	15	413
Scott's Brigade,	1,312	65	2,122
Ripley's Brigade,	992	36	1,415
Porter's Brigade,	710	43	830
Total,	3,344	159	4,780

A portion of General Porter's brigade did not join him until July seventh, after the invasion had begun.

The whole force numbered about four thousand men effective for duty. Considerable attention had been given to disciplining and drilling the regulars, until these troops were in a fair state of efficiency and eager for an invasion of Canada. As an instance of the discipline that prevailed, it is related that four privates from the regulars convicted of desertion were shot in the presence of General Scott, his staff, and the army, near the present corner

of Front Avenue and Maryland Street, in June, 1814. The volunteers, however, were in poor condition for service. On many occasions during the war these troops had shown not only inefficiency but absolute cowardice. The reason for this is clear enough. The militia of that day consisted of men who would volunteer only for short terms, and a man who had served five or six months was looked upon as a veteran, the average term of service being but a few weeks. They were poorly armed, equipped, and commanded; and it is no wonder that they were content to endure the hardships incident to a soldier's life for only a few weeks.

The late war with Spain has clearly shown how difficult it is to supply an army with the thousand and one things it requires, although at the present time the resources of this country are practically inexhaustible. When the condition of the country during the War of 1812 is considered, the statement that the volunteers were scantily supplied with equipment will cause no astonishment. For instance, on July third, the day Fort Erie was captured and the Canadian invasion was begun, Porter's brigade had not been issued a rifle, saber, bayonet, or blanket, and but a small number of tents.

The volunteers were green troops, and badly handled; and, being jeered at and made a convenience of by the regulars in the fatigue work, it is of small wonder that army life was distasteful and that poor service resulted. In the training and control of these volunteers, General Peter B. Porter, then a Buffalonian, showed great ability; and, as he was one of the foremost men of this locality—and, indeed, of the state—a gentleman born and bred, of fine bearing and courtly manners, he commanded their respect and admiration. General Brown, in a letter to Governor Tompkins, referring to Porter, only stated a fact when he said, "In the midst of the greatest danger I have found his mind cool and collected and his judgment to be relied upon." He was full of resources and prompt to seize a favorable opportunity to secure an advantage, although not bred a soldier. His conduct during

this war was justly recognized by the government, which brevetted him a Major General; and for his gallantry and bravery during the war Congress voted him a gold medal. Volunteer generals of capacity and aggressiveness even unto this day are jealous of the regular army officers and a trifle insubordinate. Porter appears to have been no exception to the rule, as his letters to Governor Tompkins disclose, but when it came to a fight he loyally supported his superiors and freely exposed his life to gain a victory. Under Porter the militia stood up against the trained troops of the British like veterans, and at Chippewa, Lundy's Lane, and Fort Erie their conduct went far to redeem the bad reputation the American militia had acquired during the preceding years of the war.

Porter died at Niagara Falls, aged seventy-one. A beautiful monument was erected over his grave, and upon it is engraved the following epitaph, which is so apt an estimate of his services and character that a portion of it, at least, is well worth quoting.

PETER BUEL PORTER.

A pioneer in western New York; a statesman eminent in the annals of the nation and the state; a general in the armies of America defending in the field what he had maintained in the council. \* \* \* Known and mourned throughout that extensive region which he had been among the foremost to explore and to defend.

The characters of Brown, Scott, and Ripley are well known. Each was uniformly successful. Brown and Scott were brave even to recklessness, and ready to fight under any and all circumstances, while Ripley inclined to overcautiousness.

The monthly return of the regulars for June thirtieth, 1814, was as follows:

	Present for Duty, N. C. O. and Men.	Officers.	Aggregate Present and Absent.
SCOTT'S BRIGADE (First).			
Ninth Regiment,	332	16	642
Eleventh Regiment,	416	17	577
Twenty-second Regiment,	217	12	287
Twenty-fifth Regiment,	354	16	619
General staff,		4	4
Total,	1,319	65	2,129

# *Before the Invasion*

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	Present for Duty.		Aggregate
	N. C. O. and Men.	Officers.	Present and Absent.
RIPLEY'S BRIGADE (Second).			
Twenty-first Regiment,	651	25	917
Twenty-third Regiment,	341	8	496
General staff,		2	2
Total,	992	35	1,415
ARTILLERY (Major Hindman).			
Towson's,	89		101
Riddle's,	80		104
Ritchie's,	96		138
Williams's,	62		73
Total,	327		416

## CHAPTER III.

*The Campaign down the Niagara.*

Besides the brilliant incidents in the minor operations of the campaign, the splendid victories gained on the Canadian side of the Niagara by the American forces under Major General Brown and Brigadiers Scott and Gaines have gained for these heroes and their emulating companions the most unfading laurels.—*Madison.*

On the second day of July, 1814, General Brown issued an order to his command stating that he was authorized by the government to put it in motion against the enemy; and on the same day, accompanied by Generals Scott and Ripley, he made a careful reconnoissance of Fort Erie to determine upon a plan of attack. Fort Erie will be described later on. It is sufficient to state here that it was a poorly fortified stone fort defended by a small garrison of about one hundred and forty officers and men under command of Major Buck of the British army.

On the third of July, pursuant to the plan agreed upon, Scott, with his brigade and some artillery and Indians, crossed the river from Black Rock, about a mile below the fort, whilst Ripley, with a portion of his brigade, crossed about a mile above. Scott reached the fort first (as Ripley from some cause—a fog, some authorities say—seems to have been delayed), and alone invested the fort at daylight. Scott posted some eighteen-pounders within easy range of the fort, and his Indians scoured the woods. Ripley soon joined Scott, and the fort was given two hours to surrender. Much to the disgust of the British commander in chief, the fort capitulated Sunday afternoon, July third, 1814, and the Americans took possession with a loss of only four men wounded, the garrison marching out and stacking arms. The British appeared to feel its loss keenly. General Drummond, writing to Sir George Prevost July tenth, says:

“I regret exceedingly the loss of this place, which I had the strongest hopes would have made an excellent defence, or, at all events, held the enemy in check for several days.”

As the British forces were stationed at Chippewa Creek, only a day's march away, reinforcements could have reached the fort during the night and possibly have outnumbered and routed the Americans. In fact, several companies of the Royal Scots were marching to the assistance of the fort when the news reached them that it had capitulated. In a general order issued by the governor in chief of Canada, that official expresses his surprise and mortification that the fort surrendered "without having made an adequate defence."

General Brown's forces camped about the fort that night; but early the next day, leaving Lieutenant McDonough and a small force to garrison the fort, Brown put his army in motion to attack the British forces who were encamped near Chippewa Creek, eighteen miles away down the Niagara River. By early morning of the fifth the American army had taken up position in front of the enemy, and on that day the severe engagement of Chippewa took place. Both sides claimed a victory in the official reports; but the Americans clearly had the best of the battle in every respect, and our forces were jubilant over the showing they had made against the British regulars.\*

General Brown soon set to work cutting a road through the woods to Chippewa Creek, and working parties protected by the riflemen and Indians built a bridge across the creek, as the old bridge was occupied by the British. The building of the bridge enabled Brown to turn the enemy's right flank, which Riall, the British commander, was quick to perceive. He, therefore, on the eighth of July, retreated to Fort George, at the mouth of the Niagara, the American army following and investing the fort. Here the Americans remained until July twenty-fifth, when Brown, failing to secure the coöperation of the fleet on Lake Ontario, and finding his communications threatened, determined to move his army against Burlington, where the enemy had troops and

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\* "We had never seen those gray jackets before. We supposed it was only a line of militia men, and wondered why you did not run at the first fire. We began to doubt when we found you stood firmly three or four rounds and when at length in the midst of our battery blaze we saw you 'port arms' and advance upon us we were utterly amazed. It was clear enough we had something besides militia men to deal with."—*A British officer to Douglass.*



stores, first falling back to Chippewa in order to deceive the enemy as to his intentions.

While before Fort George no engagements worth mentioning occurred; but, in accordance, apparently, with the well-settled custom at that time, the Americans carried on a predatory warfare against the defenseless noncombatant Canadians. Major MacFarland, of the Twenty-third United States Infantry, in a letter to his wife, written at the time, says:

“The [American] militia and Indians plundered and burnt everything. The whole population is against us; not a foraging party but is fired on, and not infrequently returns with missing numbers. This state was to be anticipated. The militia have burnt several private dwelling houses and on the 19th inst. burnt the village of St. Davids, consisting of 30 or 40 houses. This was done within three miles of our camp, and my battalion was sent to cover the retreat, as they had been sent to scour the country and it was presumed they might be pursued. My God, what a service! I never witnessed such a scene, and had not the commanding officer of the party, Lieut. Colonel Stone been disgraced and sent out of the army I would have resigned.” \*

In short, no one can examine the history of this period without coming to the conclusion that the well-recognized laws of warfare were ignored by both sides and that each burned and sacked defenseless hamlets almost as often as an opportunity presented itself.

On the afternoon of the twenty-fifth of July the movement to Chippewa began, General Scott, with the First Brigade and the artillery, having the advance. When Scott reached the vicinity of Niagara Falls he received intelligence that the enemy was posted at Lundy's Lane, one half mile west of the falls, and, although it was nearly sunset, he resolved to attack at once, which he did with great vigor, first sending word back to Brown, who

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\* Poor MacFarland fell a few days afterwards at Lundy's Lane.



was with the main body. Scott maintained the contest alone with great skill for almost an hour, but after a time Ripley and Porter came up with their brigades and the battle became general.

The story of the fight has been well told by Colonel Cruikshank. As the battle was fought partly in the dark (from six o'clock to eleven) many curious mistakes occurred. General Riall, accompanied by his staff and preceded by an aide, was riding over the field when he came upon a regiment. The aide shouted, "Make room there, men, for General Riall." The ranks gave way, and the general and his staff started to ride through the regiment, when, much to his surprise, he was suddenly seized and pulled off his horse. Astonished beyond measure he shouted, "What does all this mean?" "You are prisoners, sir," was the answer. "But I am General Riall." "There is no doubt of that," responded his captor, "and I am Captain Ketchum, of the United States army." Seeing that resistance was useless, the general was heard to remark *sotto voce*, "Captain Ketchum—Ketchum. Well, you have caught us, sure enough."

Both sides claimed a victory—the British because the Americans retreated from the field of battle, leaving their killed and wounded, all the captured guns but one, and many small arms; the Americans because they drove the British from their position and held it until it seemed advisable to fall back to their camp, two miles away, for supplies and water. Porter, speaking of this fight in writing Governor Tompkins, says:

"Our victory was complete, but, alas, this victory, gained by exhibitions of bravery never surpassed in this country, was converted into a defeat *by a precipitate retreat*, leaving the dead, the wounded, and captured artillery and our hard-earned honor to the enemy. I entered my remonstrance against this measure, and I confess at the time I almost wished that fate had swept another General from the combat.\* But it is certain that no Militia General is to gain any military fame while united to a

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\* Porter would then have succeeded to the command.

regular force and commanded by their officers. \* \* \* In short, I have been brigadiered until I am quite satisfied."

Colonel Hercules Scott, of the One-hundred-and-third Regiment, writing to his sister, says:

"On the 5th of this month a severe action [ Chippewa ] was fought within about five miles of this place, wherein our troops were defeated with heavy loss. In the first action I was not engaged, but we had another severe one on the 25th, when we had *rather* the advantage."

A table of the losses at Chippewa and Lundy's Lane will be found at the end of this chapter, which will show how desperate was the fighting. As Generals Brown and Scott were both severely wounded, the command devolved upon Ripley, who, acting under Brown's directions, withdrew the army to Fort Erie, which he reached at eleven o'clock on the night of July twenty-sixth. He immediately took up the strongest position possible, and awaited the attack he knew was inevitable.

As an illustration of how severe the losses were at Lundy's Lane: Colonel Miller's regiment lost one hundred and twenty-six killed, wounded, and missing out of about three hundred men. Colonel Miller was the man who, being asked during the battle if his regiment (the Twenty-first infantry) could take a certain battery made the historic response, "I will try, sir." Listen to Miller's report:

"It was then evening, but moonlight. General Brown turned to me, and said: 'Col. Miller, take your regiment and storm that work and take it.' I had short of three hundred men with me, as my regiment had been much weakened by the numerous details made from it during the day. I, however, immediately obeyed the order."

Of the First Brigade, the commander (Scott), his aide, a staff major, and every commander of battalion were either killed or

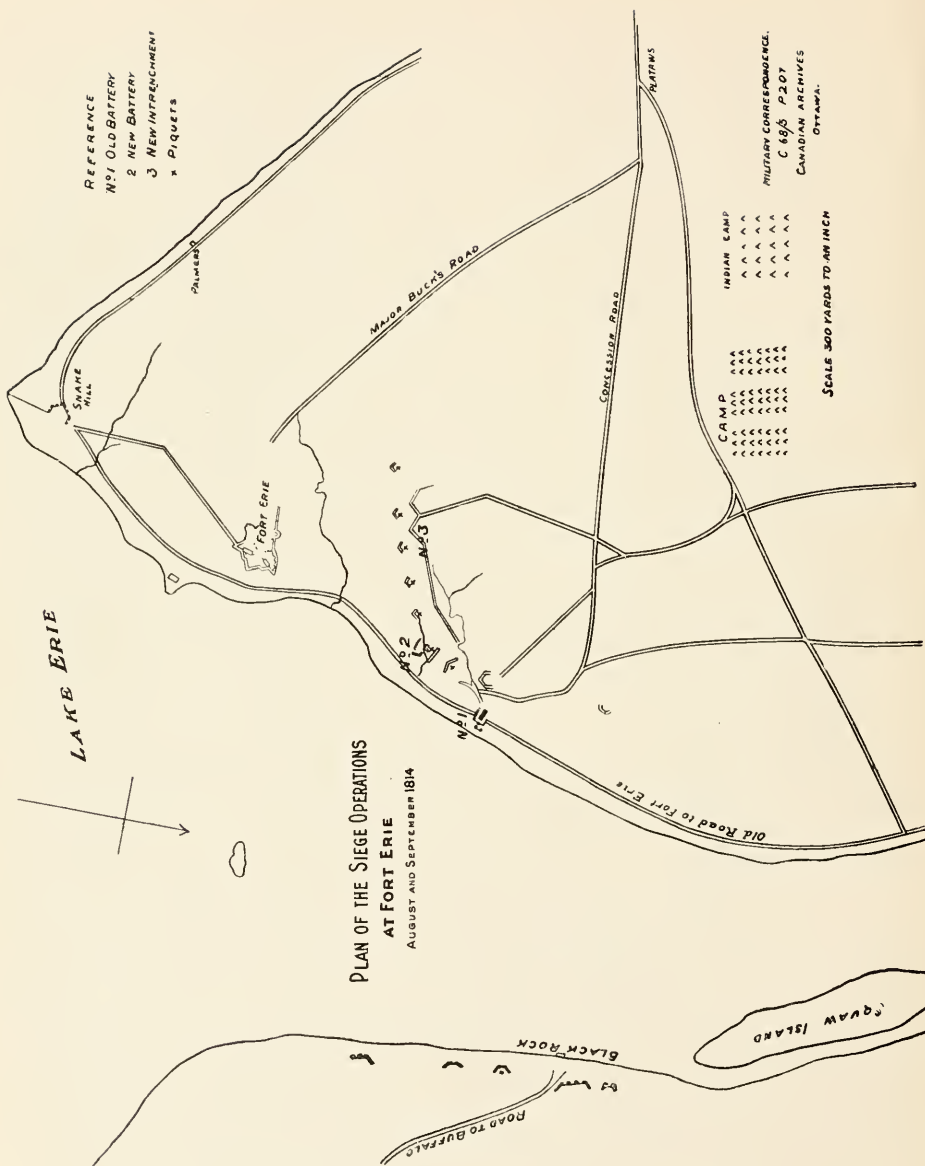
wounded. In fact, Scott's brigade was all cut to pieces, and its remnants were collected and served during the siege of Fort Erie under a lieutenant colonel.

The following table of losses is interesting:

CHIPPEWA.				
	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Total.
American,	60	249	19	328
British,	148	221	46	415

LUNDY'S LANE.				
American,	171	570	117	858
British,	84	554	235	873*

\* Colonel Scott stated the English loss at 939 killed, wounded, and missing.



## CHAPTER IV.

*The Beginning of the Siege.*

As already stated, Fort Erie was constructed by the British in 1764, and was intended more as a fortified trading post than a fort to withstand a siege. A careful and technical description of the fort will be found in Volume II., page 216, of *The Historical Magazine* (third series), to which the reader is referred. When captured by us it consisted of two bastions, one on the north and the other on the south face of a rectangular stone structure, these being connected on the westerly side by a line of pickets, an abattis, and a ditch. Two blockhouses, or mess buildings, were situated on a continuation of the easterly faces of the bastions, leaving a space between the blockhouses of barely forty feet. This space was fortified by a curtain running from one blockhouse to the other, in which was located the main gate of the fort. On the easterly side of the fort was a ravelin. The fort was of stone, and the construction was too light to resist anything but the field-pieces of that period. The woods on the north and west came down to within sixty rods of our works; but, save a ravine two hundred yards to the north, the *terrain* was generally level and inclined to be swampy. It had been in our possession before during the war. On May twenty-sixth, 1813, the commandant of the fort, who held the place with some Canadian militia, having bombarded Black Rock since the day before, and fearing an attack, blew up his magazine, destroyed his supplies, and, after dismissing his troops, evacuated the fort, whereupon the Americans promptly crossed over the river and took possession of it. Subsequent events, however, compelled us in turn to abandon it.

As previously stated, Lieutenant McDonough and a small garrison were left in the fort while Brown was operating down the Niagara. This officer worked diligently strengthening the fort by deepening the ditches and raising the bastions. He also took

out the line of pickets on the west flank and began the construction of a redoubt to protect the bastions.

When Ripley reached the fort it was in a very poor condition to resist a determined assault; but there were several excellent regular army engineers in the army, and the work of fortifying the position was entrusted to them. General Ripley took up the strongest available position, with his right resting in the fort and his left extending nearly parallel to the lake some seven hundred yards southerly to a small hillock called Snake Hill, where the water line curved in towards the west. This brought our left only about fifty yards from the lake. Nature added nothing to the strength of the position, and, as its weakness was appreciated, strenuous efforts were soon made to strengthen it in every way possible. The following improvements were commenced: an earthwork from the southerly side of the fort to the hillock on our extreme left; an embrasure on the hillock for Towson's battery of five guns; two bastions on the west side of the fort; embrasures for Riddle's and Fontaine's batteries; an earthwork running easterly from the fort towards Niagara River, with an embrasure for Douglass's battery on the easterly end,\* numerous camp traverses; an abattis from the Niagara River on our right, extending clear around the works to the river on our left; and the completion of the redoubt commenced by McDonough. It will be seen that these improvements converted a very weak fort into a rather strong position, and the fort changed into a fortified camp with the rear open and protected by the Niagara.

While this work was being vigorously prosecuted, on the first of August, Sir Gordon Drummond, who held the rank of lieutenant general, appeared before the fort with upwards of four thousand men,† drove in the American pickets, and took up a

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\* Lossing states that Douglass's battery was mounted *en barbette* in a small stonework, but more reliable authorities state that the battery was finally planted in an earthwork like the others. It was at first laid *en barbette* and afterwards changed.

† Many of these men were veterans fresh from Wellington's army. After the battle of Lundy's Lane Drummond had been reinforced by De Watteville's regiment, one thousand or twelve hundred strong, recruited in Spain, and composed of Poles, Spaniards, Germans, and Portuguese.

position on the hills opposite Black Rock. Apparently at this time he did not anticipate a very stout resistance from the fort, but subsequent events increased his respect for American prowess.

On the second of August occurred the first clash between the opposing forces, and this on American soil, within the present limits of Buffalo. General Brown had posted some two hundred and forty men, composing the First Battalion of the First Regiment of riflemen under Major Morgan, an extremely capable officer, on the American side of the river as a guard to protect Black Rock and Buffalo. General Drummond immediately perceived that if he could destroy the stores of ordnance and supplies, and defeat the militia at Black Rock and Buffalo, it would seriously embarrass the defenders of Fort Erie, if it did not cause them to surrender. He therefore directed Lieutenant Colonel Tucker, with a force of six hundred men, to cross the river before daylight on the third and carry out the project.

On the evening of the second Major Morgan observed movements of the enemy on the Canadian side of the river which led him to suspect he might be attacked. He immediately took up a position on the south bank of Scajaquada Creek commanding the bridge, threw up log breastworks, and awaited developments. At two o'clock in the morning of the third, Morgan's pickets reported Tucker to be crossing the river. Morgan thereupon took up a portion of the planks forming the roadway across the bridge and awaited the attack.

Shortly after four that morning Tucker attacked Morgan's position, endeavoring to cross the bridge and carry it by assault. The British bravely advanced to the attack; but when the rushing column perceived the absence of the roadway of the bridge it recoiled, the Americans in the meantime pouring in a withering fire, and in the confusion some of the assailants were crowded off the bridge into the waters of the creek. The assault failed, but, not disheartened, the British endeavored to repair the bridge under fire. This attempt also failed, as the bridge was completely commanded by the fire of Morgan's men. Retiring, the British



started up a fire at long range, and, detaching a column, endeavored to ford the creek above the bridge; but Morgan, on the alert for such a move, sent sixty men to oppose the movement, who completely repulsed the British. Tucker, after consultation with his officers, determined to retreat, and thereupon skillfully withdrew across the Niagara with his killed and wounded, "owing [as he says] to the enemy having destroyed the bridge over Conguichity\* Creek prior to our arrival at that point, and there being no possibility of fording it." Tucker, in his official report, attributes the failure of the attack to the cowardice of his men. He reports a loss of twelve killed, seventeen wounded, and five missing. Our loss was two killed and eight wounded. This skirmish greatly encouraged the Americans; and, besides, it resulted in an increase of the force at Buffalo, which deterred Drummond from making another attempt. This skirmish was afterwards known as the Battle of Conjockey, and Morgan as the "hero of Conjockey."

Drummond, always prone to find fault, issued an order publicly censuring the troops for their cowardice. The following is an extract from the order:

"The indignation excited in the mind of the Lieut.-General from discovering that the failure of an expedition the success of which by destroying the enemy's means of subsistence would have compelled his force on this side to have surrendered to the troops by which he is invested or by risking an action with the Lieut.-General in the field to have met certain defeat has been solely caused by the misbehavior of the troops employed on this honorable service will not permit him to expatiate on a subject so unmilitary and disgraceful. \* \* \* To the troops most particularly alluded to it is the Lieut.-General's determination to afford an immediate opportunity of at once effacing from his mind the impression which the report of the officers and his own observation have produced and of averting that report of their

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\* That is, Conjockey.



conduct which he shall feel it his indispensable and imperious duty to lay at the feet of his sovereign.

“Crouching, ducking, or laying down when advancing under fire are bad habits and must be corrected.”

If Drummond had taken Buffalo the American base of communications would have been cut off and our army compelled to evacuate the fort at once. If Drummond laid so much importance to this skirmish it is difficult to see why he did not attempt the movement later on with a larger force, to which the Americans could have made little, if any, resistance. The American army would have then been placed in a serious predicament.

On the day this fight occurred General Drummond pushed forward a brigade to the edge of the woods surrounding Fort Erie, and, making a careful reconnoissance of the position, decided after “mature consideration” not to assault until after the guns of heavy caliber he had sent for from Fort George were mounted and had made a breach in the walls. In coming to this decision, Drummond made his first serious mistake, which the Americans hailed with considerable satisfaction. The works were weak and ill fitted to stand the determined assault Drummond’s veterans were capable of making, and which they afterward made; and each day was improved by our forces in putting them into better condition. Never was delay more fatal to the success of a movement.

An assault was not made until the fifteenth of August, when all the batteries were in position; but at this time (August fourth) Towson’s battery, on our left, which gave the British the most trouble during the assault, was not planted, which would have rendered our left easily flanked and turned. This battery was not completed until the tenth. The mistake was most serious. The Americans, although somewhat surprised, immediately laid aside their muskets and went to work with their spades; and, although the proposed improvements had not all been made by August fifteenth, the defenses were soon in a tolerable condition to resist an attack.

Brown, it appears, was not satisfied with Ripley's conduct during his term of command after Lundy's Lane. One reason for Brown's complaint was that he claims to have ordered Ripley to retake possession of the battlefield of Lundy's Lane early in the morning following the battle, and that Ripley failed to carry out the order. In any event, Brown and Scott both being disabled by wounds, Major General Edmund P. Gaines was sent for to come on from Sackett's Harbor. He arrived on August fourth, and at once assumed command. Although General Ripley was superseded, he appears to have always conducted himself with conspicuous gallantry, and led his troops with more than ordinary ability. He was a loyal, brave man. Gaines at this time was thirty-seven years old, and a man of fine presence. His high reputation had preceded him, and his arrival at Fort Erie caused great enthusiasm in the little army. He was a soldier by profession, and had worked his way from a lieutenancy through the various grades to that of a brigadier generalship in the regular army. He was brevetted a major general, and received a gold medal and the thanks of Congress for his services and bravery at Fort Erie; and, in addition to these honors, three states presented him with swords. He died at New Orleans, at the age of seventy-two.

While the Americans were engaged in strengthening their works, the British were not idle. Parallel lines of earthworks and abattis were constructed northwesterly from Fort Erie, the nearest of which was about five hundred yards away, running from the river almost due west for one thousand yards. Two blockhouses were built and embrasures constructed for two batteries—Number One situated near the river, nearly a thousand yards from our works, and Number Two situated about two hundred and fifty yards nearer the fort and about two hundred yards from the river.\* It took some time to complete them, Battery Number Two not opening fire until August nineteenth, or even later. It consisted of two long eighteen-pounders, one

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\* The location of these batteries is shown upon the map on page 24.

twenty-four-pound carronade, and an eight-inch howitzer. These batteries were planted in the woods, and when completed avenues were cut through the trees to admit of their playing upon our lines; but, owing to the construction of the artillery of that day, it was soon found that both batteries were laid too far away to admit of their doing very effective execution. It was thought when they were erected they would soon batter down the fort, because they took our works in reverse, but throughout the whole siege they did comparatively little mischief. The British had their camp at Waterloo, nearly two miles from their lines, one brigade being constantly on duty at the front.

The map found at the front of this sketch, to which the attention of the reader is called, will make clear the relative positions of the two armies.

The British army consisted of upwards of four thousand, while our forces at first did not exceed two thousand eight hundred. On August first, Lieutenant Douglass fired one of his pieces at an advance party of the enemy, and on the second some American soldiers, without orders, fired a cannon at the British; but neither side really opened fire with any energy until August seventh, when the British opened with all their available guns. The Americans displayed their colors from every staff; the field music and regimental bands struck up Yankee Doodle; and amid the cheers of the garrison the fire was returned with spirit, if not with effect. The cannonading continued with only slight intermissions until August fifteenth. Up to this time skirmishing was daily going on between the lines, in which many more were killed and wounded than the importance of the results accomplished by the movements seem to justify. On the twelfth of August, in a skirmish, Major Morgan, the "hero of Conjockety" was killed—a loss which our army felt severely. General Drummond, in a letter to Sir George Prevost, dated August twelfth, not only refers to this skirmishing, but makes a statement very significant of the mode of warfare then apparently regarded as entirely proper. He says:

"The enemy makes daily efforts with his riflemen to dislodge our advanced picquets and to obtain a reconnoissance of what we are doing. These attacks, tho' feeble and invariably repulsed, yet harass our troops and occasion us some loss. I enclose returns of those of the 10th and of this day. Your Excellency will observe with concern that on both occasions we have lost an officer killed. I am happy to report that on every occasion the troops show great steadiness and invariably inflict a loss on the enemy more considerable than their own. The Indians went forward with great spirit the day before yesterday, *and in the affair of this day it has just been reported to me they surprised, took, and scalped every man of one of the enemy's picquets.*"

This last sentence is italicized, not to emphasize how deprivileged the British were, but to show the mode of warfare of the period.

The almost incessant fire of the enemy greatly annoyed the garrison, and more especially the parties told off to work on the fortifications, although great pains were taken to protect them. Notwithstanding the precautions used, it was a not infrequent occurrence for a shot to strike amongst a party with great effect. The enemy elevated their pieces, and by using small charges of powder dropped shells and round shot into the fort from such an elevation that the traverses were of little protection. For instance: a sergeant was being shaved in a spot protected by the traverse, when both his head and the hand of the barber were taken off by a single shot. Such casualties happened altogether too frequently for the peace of mind of the little army, although the men soon became somewhat accustomed to the danger.

On the twelfth of August the Americans opened on the British with a battery situated at Black Rock, almost the first discharge wounding a sergeant and five men. This fire annoyed the enemy considerably during the siege, and compelled them to construct numerous camp traverses to protect themselves from the flank fire.

Three armed American schooners of small tonnage, formerly belonging to Perry's fleet, were anchored off the fort, and by a flank fire added greatly to the strength of our position. Captain Dobbs, of the Royal Navy, conceived the idea of embarking a force in small boats, and, by representing them to be provision boats from Fort Erie, to board and capture the schooners. Accordingly, on the night of the twelfth, with a party of seventy sailors and marines, Dobbs, under cover of the darkness, succeeded, with small loss, in capturing the *Ohio* and the *Somers*, the *Porcupine*, the third schooner, escaping. These schooners mounted three long twelve-pounders, and carried thirty-five men each. The loss to us, while not very severe, was considerable.

Colonel Hercules Scott, in a letter to his brother dated August twelfth, a part of which was written August fourteenth, says :

"Since writing the above our battery (No. 1) has opened against the Fort and continued the whole of yesterday without having the smallest effect. It is at much too great a distance. I expect we shall be ordered to storm tomorrow. I have little hope of success from this manœuvre. I shall probably write you more, that is, if I get over this present business."

Colonel Scott fell August fifteenth at the head of his regiment.

## CHAPTER V.

*The Attack on the Fort.*

"The attack on this place was perhaps the most gallant of the whole war."  
—*Auchinlock.*

The narrative now reaches a point where the first hard fighting occurred. General Drummond, having made several careful reconnoissances of the American position, came to the conclusion it could be carried by assault. Our works did present several vulnerable places; for, notwithstanding the great efforts made by the Americans during the past fortnight, the abattis was weak, and openings existed between Douglass's battery and the river on our right and between the fort and the breastworks running easterly to the river. Our left Drummond also considered somewhat weak, but subsequent events proved otherwise. It may be well at this point to again recur to our position and see how our forces were disposed. It will be remembered that Douglass's battery, consisting of a six-pounder and an eighteen-pounder, was situated on our extreme right and rear; that Towson's battery of six guns, all fieldpieces, occupied Snake Hill on our extreme left, and was elevated some twenty feet, so as to completely command the esplanade; that Fontaine's, afterwards Fanning's, battery of two guns was planted near the fort at the northerly end of the breastwork, while Biddle's battery of three guns was posted on the breastwork about two hundred and fifty yards from the fort. The fort mounted a twenty-four-pounder, an eighteen-pounder, and a twelve-pounder. The artillery was all under the command of Major Hindman, of the regulars, and apparently was handled with great skill. Parts of the Eleventh, Ninth, and Twenty-second regiments of regulars, under command of Lieutenant Colonel Aspinwall, were posted on our right; Porter, with his militia and the First and Fourth regiments of riflemen held the center; while on the left General Ripley was posted with the



Twenty-first and Twenty-third regulars. Fort Erie was defended by the Nineteenth United States Infantry under Captain Williams.

General Drummond, having determined to assault on the fifteenth of August, decided to pave the way by a vigorous cannonading, which he began at sunrise on the thirteenth and continued until eight o'clock in the evening of that day. He resumed firing on the fourteenth at daybreak, and it was then continued without intermission up to an hour before the time the assault was made. We returned the fire briskly a portion of the time. During this period we lost ten killed and thirty-five wounded, and our troops were greatly annoyed by the incessant fire. The works, however, were not seriously damaged, although Drummond reported that "the stone building had been much injured and the general outline of the parapet and embrasures very much altered."

General Drummond carefully planned his attack. His "arrangement" is here set out in full, because, as he engaged all his organizations, it will show the different ones that composed his army, as well as the disposition of his troops.

(SECRET.)

"HEADQUARTERS,  
"CAMP BEFORE FORT ERIE, 14th Aug., 1814.

*Arrangement.*

*"Right Column—Lt.-Col. Fischer:*

King's Regiment.

Volunteers—Regt. De Watteville.

Light Companies—89th and 100th Regts.

Detachment Royal Artillery, one officer and 12 men and a rocketeer with a couple of 12-pound rockets.

Capt. Eustace's picquet of cavalry.

Capt. Powell, Deputy-Asst.-Quartermaster General will conduct this column, which is to attack the left of the enemy's position.

*"Centre Column—Lt.-Col. Drummond:*

Flank Companies—41st Regiment.

do. do. 104th do.

Royal Marines—50.

Seamen—90.

Detachment Royal Artillery, one subaltern and 12 men.

Capt. Barney, 89th Regt., will guide this column, which is to attack the fort.

*"Left Column—Col. Scott, 103d Regt.:*

103d Regt.

Capt. Elliott, Deputy-Asst.-Quartermaster-General, will conduct this column, which will attack the right of the enemy's position towards the lake, and endeavor to penetrate by the opening between the fort and the entrenchment, using the short ladders at the same time to pass the entrenchment which is reported to be defended only by the enemy's 9th Regt., 250 strong.

"The infantry picquets on Buck's road to be pushed on with the Indians to attack the enemy's picquets on that road. Lt.-Col. Nichols, Quartermaster-General of Militia, will conduct this column.

"The rest of the troops, viz.:

1st Battalion Royals,

Remainder of De Watteville's Regt.,

Glengarry Light Infantry and Incorporated Militia,

will remain in reserve under Lt.-Col. Tucker and are to be posted on the ground at present occupied by our picquets and covering parties.

"Squadron of 19th Dragoons in rear of the battery nearest to the advance, ready to receive charge of prisoners and conduct them to the rear.

"The Lieut.-General will station himself at or near the battery, where reports are to be made to him.



"Lt.-Col. Fischer, commanding the right column, will follow the instructions he has received, copy of which is communicated to Col. Scott and Lt.-Col. Drummond for their guidance.

"The Lieut.-General *most strongly recommends a free use of the bayonet*. The enemy's force does not exceed 1500 fit for duty, and those are represented as much dispirited.

"The ground on which the columns of attack are to be formed will be pointed out, and the orders for their guidance will be given by the Lieut.-General commanding.

"J. HARVEY,

"D. A. G."

As nearly as can be estimated these columns were of the following strength :

Fischer's column,	1,100
Drummond's column,	700
Scott's column,	750
	<hr/>
	2,550

Most careful and explicit written instructions were issued to Lieutenant Colonel Fischer, directing how the details of the assault on our left should be carried out, and copies of these were given Colonels Drummond and Scott, the leaders of the other columns. Fischer was directed to move out from his camp before dark on the fourteenth and take up a position in the woods as close to our left as possible, exercising the greatest care that the enemy be not advised of his presence through deserters. Loud talking was forbidden; no fires were to be lit; and hourly roll calls were directed to be held. The American troops were thought by the British to be "diminished and dispirited," and possibly this fact caused Drummond to make another curious but serious mistake. In Fischer's letter of instructions from Drummond he is directed to have his men (except the reserve) remove the flints from their muskets to obviate any chance of their firing prematurely and "to insure secrecy." His order says :

“The advantages which will arise from taking out the flints are obvious. Combined with darkness and silence, it will effectually conceal the situation and number of our troops; and those of the enemy being exposed by his fire and his white trousers, which are very conspicuous marks to our view, it will enable them to use the bayonet with effect, which that valuable weapon has been ever found to possess in the hands of British soldiers.”

These instructions in respect to the flints also applied to the other columns.

So much for the plan.

While the American troops were engaged in the usual evening parade on the fourteenth, a shell from the enemy struck within the fort and exploded a small magazine, which blew up with a tremendous report heard for miles. The English, thinking the shell had done serious damage, set up a “loud and joyous shout,” which the Americans were not slow to answer by hearty cheers; and the gallant Captain Williams, killed a few hours afterwards, before the smoke of the explosion had lifted, renewed the cannonading from the largest gun within the fort.

Gaines during the past few days had observed several things which made it clear to him an assault was imminent, and thinking the explosion of the magazine might encourage the enemy to make it that night took every precaution to insure a successful defense. One third of the garrison was kept on duty, and the balance lay down on their arms ready to fall in at a minute's notice. Lighted dark lanterns were placed at the guns; bags of canister were hung within easy reach; and the guns were charged afresh. Before turning in, Gaines, accompanied by his engineers, went carefully over the works, spoke a word of encouragement to the men, and saw that his command was prepared to make a prompt and stout defense. When McRea, the chief engineer, visited Douglass, he told him if the threatened attack did come he could rely upon it his battery would be one of the points assailed. Douglass relates how bags of musket balls suited to the

caliber of his guns were hung beside each piece, how linstocks were placed where they could be easily reached and dark lanterns lit, and how the guns were charged so heavily with grape shot that the last wad could be touched with the hand. The gun crews lay on the platforms ready to leap to the guns at the first alarm, which all felt sure would soon come. The garrison had not the slightest intimation of an attack, so far as the English could observe. The timely precautions so wisely taken by Gaines undoubtedly saved the day for the Americans.

The night was pitch dark, and during the fore part of the evening rain had been falling. A picket of one hundred men under Lieutenant Belknap of the Twenty-third Infantry, along about two in the morning of the fifteenth heard suspicious sounds coming from the direction the enemy would naturally advance. Not wishing to alarm the garrison needlessly, he waited until he was sure a column (Fischer's) was approaching, when he fired a volley and slowly retreated upon the fort firing as he came. He gallantly kept the enemy in check for a short time, which was of great value to our forces; and as he brought up the rear he received a severe bayonet wound just as he was about to enter the fort, so close did the enemy's advance press him. The objective of Fischer's attack was the space between our left and the river; but the enemy carried scaling ladders and were prepared to mount our works wherever opportunity offered. But instead of overpowering the small interior guard and bayoneting the sleepy occupants of the garrison before a resolute defense could be made, as the British hoped to do, they found they were confronted with an entirely different situation. No sooner was the first shot heard than the officers ran down the lines of tents crying "To arms! to arms!" The reserves, all dressed and ready for the fight, ran to the parapets to assist their comrades, while the trained gun crews leaped to their pieces and freshly primed them; and while some of the crew held their hands over the priming to protect it from the dampness others grasped the linstocks, opened the dark lanterns, and lit the slow matches, all in less time than it takes to tell

it. The silent infantry lined the parapets and peered into the darkness eager for the fight to commence and the period of suspense to be over. Gaines says in his official report:

“The night was dark and the early part of it raining *but the faithful sentinel* slept not. One third of the troops were up at their posts. At half past two o'clock the right column of the enemy approached and though enveloped in darkness *black as his designs and principles* was distinctly heard on our left and promptly marked by our musketry under Major Wood and artillery under Captain Towson.”

As soon as the approaching British were faintly discerned through the darkness, Towson's battery and the Twenty-first and Twenty-third infantry opened with a tremendous crash, lighting up the night with the glare of the fire. Towson's battery, for its work that night, received the nickname of “Towson's lighthouse.” The enemy bravely stood the fire and advanced to within a few feet of our lines before recoiling. A portion of his forces, by wading breast-deep in the river, succeeded in passing around the abattis and were about to attack our position from the rear, when two companies of the Twenty-first Regiment, posted to meet such an emergency, rushed up and opened so deadly a fire that very few of the enemy escaped. Many were carried dead or wounded down the river by the swift current. Again and again the enemy gallantly assaulted, and as often were they repulsed with great loss by the battery and musketry fire. Five distinct assaults were made. Disheartened and worn out, the shattered column finally withdrew, leaving their dead upon the field and one hundred and forty-seven prisoners in our hands. No further attempt was made to assault our left, and the attack of the largest column of the enemy and the one upon which General Drummond relied to accomplish the most important results had utterly failed, notwithstanding the bravery it displayed.

When Lieutenant Colonel Drummond and Colonel Scott heard the attack of Fischer in progress they put their columns

in motion, and, pursuant to the instructions, Drummond directed his forces against the fort, while Scott, proceeding south along the river, attacked Douglass's battery and the earthwork on that side. Colonel Scott, with the One-hundred-and-third Regiment, advanced bravely to the attack. He was met by the fire of the Ninth Regiment and two companies of volunteers (Broughton's and Harding's), besides the volleys of canister from Douglass's battery and a six-pounder posted between the battery and the river and commanded by Major McRea of the engineers. Even the One-hundred-and-third, veterans of many a hard-fought field, could not make headway against such a fire, and when about fifty yards away the column was seen by the anxious watchers in the fort to first hesitate, then waver, and then retreat in confusion, leaving many dead and wounded. So intense was the fire that one of the garrison compared the roar of the artillery and the musketry fire to the close double drag of a drum on a grand scale. About the time Scott's column fell back, loud cries to cease firing were heard, coming apparently from the fort. Douglass, supposing the order came from our officers, ceased working his guns, but seeing Scott's column again preparing to rush to the assault, and suspecting a *ruse de guerre*, immediately reopened fire and again repulsed the assault.\* Brackenridge is responsible for the statement that the One-hundred-and-third Regiment left one third of its number upon the field, including its brave colonel, who, while leading the charge, was shot through the head.† No further attack was made at this point, although most of the attacking force afterwards mingled with Drummond's column and assisted it in the assault on the bastion.

Two of the three columns had utterly failed to effect a lodgment in the works. The third was more successful. Lieutenant Colonel Drummond, the commander chosen to lead the troops against the fort, was a professional soldier of great bravery

\* Douglass says he heard a voice cry in a foreign accent, "Cease firing; you're firing upon your own men," and immediately after a stentorian Yankee voice angrily yelled from the fort, "Go to hell! Fire away there! why don't you?" He claims his fire had not ceased, but that that of the infantry, or, at least, a part of it, had.

† The British accounts say that Scott was killed within the fort.

and possessed of that stubbornness so characteristic of the British soldier—a quality which renders him incapable of appreciating when he is beaten. A Spanish report of an engagement during the late war describes the Americans as still pressing forward, notwithstanding the fact that they were already defeated by the well-directed fire of the Spaniards. Colonel Drummond was a fighter of this description. While Fischer and Scott were engaging the left and the right, Lieutenant Colonel Drummond, with the force described in the order (consisting of about seven hundred men), assaulted the center with an almost irresistible impetuosity. He was, however, beaten back by the men of the Nineteenth Regiment and by the artillery fire. Again and again, rallying his men, he returned to the attack, only to be repulsed. Finally, owing to the dense cloud of smoke from the guns and to the darkness of the night (for the day was only just about to dawn), with some men belonging to the Royal Artillery, he crept along the ditch of the fort, and, planting scaling ladders, with which his column was provided, climbed into the northern bastion, closely followed by many of the attacking party, before the Americans realized what had happened. Bayoneting the defenders of the bastion, they seized the guns and turned them against the fort.

Among the artillerists defending the bastion was Lieutenant McDonough, who, it will be remembered, was left in charge of the fort during Brown's campaign down the Niagara. As he was severely wounded by a bayonet thrust he asked for quarter. Gaines, in his official report, thus describes the scene:

“Lieut. McDonough, being severely wounded, demanded quarter; it was refused by Col. Drummond. The Lieutenant then seized a handspike and nobly defended himself until he was shot down with a pistol by the monster who had refused him quarter, who often reiterated the order ‘Give the damned Yankees no quarter.’”

Colonel Drummond was shot through the heart and bayoneted a few moments afterwards. He immediately expired. His



body was blown up when the explosion of the bastion occurred, but when his remains were afterwards searched, a copy of General Drummond's order, directing the assault, was found, and it was observed that the bayonet, in entering his body, had passed through that portion of the order wherein General Drummond "recommends a free use of the bayonet."

Near the bastion stood a stone blockhouse, which was manned by the Americans, and an attempt made to drive the British from the bastion; but they evinced no disposition to retire from their hard-won position, and the fight waged furiously.

About two hours and a half had elapsed since the attack first developed, and it was now daylight. This enabled our batteries, especially Fanning's,\* to keep reinforcements from reaching the British, as the guns now swept the unobstructed clearing in front of the fort, while all the other pieces were trained upon the captured bastion. Gaines called upon Ripley and Porter for reinforcements, who promptly sent them, and a determined assault was made upon the bastion. Owing, however, to the narrowness of the passage leading up to it (only two or three men being able to charge abreast), our forces were repulsed; but the Americans, nothing daunted, charged again and again with no success beyond wearing down the enemy.

While the officers were forming our men for another assault an event happened which had a decisive bearing upon the assault and which was as unexpected as it was fortunate for our arms. Underneath the platform of the captured bastion was stored a large quantity of cartridges and ammunition of various sorts. Suddenly, and from some cause never ascertained, a tremendous explosion, heard for miles around, occurred, which blew the bastion, with the men and guns upon it, high into the air. The bastion was crowded principally with men from the One-hundred-and-third Regiment (Scott's), and the explosion was of so much force that this regiment was literally blown to pieces. The cries of the wounded, the loud report, the enormous clouds of dust, the dis-

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\* Fanning outranked Fontaine, and so now was in command of the battery named after the latter.

tance objects were thrown, and the suddenness with which so many brave men were blown to eternity or terribly mangled made a profound impression upon the spectators. Its cause was long a matter of speculation and wonderment, not only along the frontier, but throughout the country as well. Lieutenant Douglass graphically describes the explosion in the following language:

“Every sound was hushed by the sense of an unnatural tremor beneath our feet like the first heave of an earthquake. Almost at the same instant the center of the bastion blew up with a terrific explosion and a jet of flame mingled with fragments of timber, earth, stone, and bodies of men rose to the height of one or two hundred feet in the air and fell in a shower of ruins to a great distance all around.”

Panic seized the uninjured, and after a few minutes the surviving remnant of the British force retired to their intrenchments under a heavy fire from the fort, protected by a battalion of the King's Royals, which was pushed forward by General Drummond to cover the retreat.

The battle was over, and the daylight revealed the dismantled bastion still smoking from the effects of the explosion. In front of our position, and especially the bastion, the ground was piled with the dead and wounded, many terribly mangled and mutilated by the explosion. The garrison immediately set to work to care for the wounded and to bury the dead.\*

During the attack the people of Black Rock and Buffalo had listened to the sounds of the combat, which drifted across the river, and had watched the discharge of the pieces, fearing lest our army would be overpowered and that there would be a repetition of the horrible events of the preceding New Year's Day. When the bastion blew up they were filled with dismay, for it was thought it meant either an abandonment of the fort or its capture by the British. But at last, with daylight, came a rowboat from

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\* Long trenches were dug near the fort, and forty or fifty men were buried in each trench. The prisoners and wounded were taken across the river to Buffalo.



the fort, which conveyed the news of the victory to the anxious watchers. It was received with great rejoicing, and spread throughout the country with rapidity, for it was the most decisive victory of the war up to that time.

## CHAPTER VI.

*The Period between the Assault and the Sortie.*

Another of our annoyances was from the bombshells. These could be avoided without much difficulty if one had time to attend to them, \* \* \* but this could not always be done.—*Douglass*.

When the smoke of battle had cleared away and each side had taken a check roll call, it was found that for a "diminished and dispirited force," the Americans had done exceedingly well. The Americans lost two captains, one lieutenant, six subalterns, two sergeants, one corporal, and seventy-two privates killed, wounded, and missing. Seventeen were killed. The total loss of the British was nine hundred and five, according to their official report, but, judging from the men left upon the field and from unofficial accounts, it was probably over one thousand, of whom about forty were officers. Drummond's official return apparently does not include the loss in De Watteville's regiment, which must have been quite severe. Drummond frankly states in his report that many of the missing were probably killed in the explosion of the bastion.

The blowing up of the bastion has been attributed to many different causes. The following are among those assigned:

I. Drummond states that ammunition under the platform of the bastion caught fire owing to the fact that the guns in the bastion were fired to the rear.

II. Lieutenant MacMahon, in a private letter to a friend, written on the twenty-second of August, says:

"It [the ammunition] was not, however, intentionally placed there for the purpose, but, seeing the opportunity, and availing himself of it, a corporal of American artillery, having got on a red coat and the cap of a British deserter, and while it was scarce daylight, got in amongst our men, who were principally in and near this bastion, and appeared to make himself very busy in

working the gun which by this time had been turned against the enemy, and in the bustle he got under the platform and effected his purpose by a slow match. He had but just time himself to slink off and get behind a stone building in the fort when this unfortunate explosion took place, which has left the One-hundred-and-third Regiment, who were principally at that point, but a mere skeleton."

III. Lossing, in his *Field Book of the War of 1812*, relates the following, which shows the power of imagination of the private soldier, the most unreliable chronicler in the world:

"The venerable Jabez Fisk, now (1867) living near Adrian, Michigan, who was in the fight, is not so reticent concerning the explosion. In a letter to me dated May 20, 1863, he writes: 'Three or four hundred of the enemy had got into the bastion. At this time an American officer came running up and said, 'General Gaines, the bastion is full. I can blow them all to hell in a minute.' They both passed back through a stone building and in a short time the bastion and the British were high in the air. General Gaines soon returned, swinging his hat and shouting, 'Hurrah for Little York!' This was in allusion to the blowing up of the British magazine at Little York, where General Pike was killed.'"

IV. A more romantic version, which gained considerable credence at the time, was that the dying McDonough, determining to sell his life as dearly as possible, threw a light into an ammunition chest and so caused the explosion.

V. In the haste with which the guns were served, a cartridge was accidentally broken, and the powder, scattering on the platform, formed a train from it to the magazine, which, being ignited, caused the explosion.

VI. The explosion was caused by an American shell.

So many causes are here assigned that the reader will doubtless find no difficulty in making a satisfactory choice, for each has this merit—it cannot be successfully controverted.

The British had made a most gallant assault, and done all that could be expected of flesh and blood. Not only failing to carry the fort, but suffering a most severe loss, the soldiers gave way to great depression. Upon retiring, they lined their intrenchments, prepared to resist a counter attack, but none came, and the caring for the dead and wounded occupied the balance of the day. A force of less than four thousand men had lost about one thousand in killed, wounded, and missing—more than one fourth,—and in Colonels Drummond and Scott's columns the loss was even heavier. For instance, Scott's regiment, the One-hundred-and-third, lost three hundred and seventy men, and out of eighteen officers fourteen were killed or wounded. In fact, some of the organizations were practically destroyed. Doctor Young, an English surgeon, in a private letter to Colonel Scott's brother, informing him of the colonel's death, writes that Scott was buried on the evening of the fifteenth, and that the funeral was attended by only three officers and himself, "*the whole that remained untouched after the attack.*"

The following pathetic extract seems worthy of quoting to show how dispirited even the officers were after the assault had failed. It is from a letter written by Colonel J. Le Couteur to his brother, and is dated July twenty-ninth, 18—.

"After we were blown up, some three or four hundred men by the springing of the mine or magazine in Fort Erie, on recovering my senses from being blown off the parapet some twenty feet into the ditch which was filled with burned and maimed men the Yankees relined their works and fired heavily into the ditch. My colonel, Drummond of Keltie, had commanded the right attack, Col. Scott the left attack. Finding that the ditch was not to be held under such disarray and such a fire, several of us jumped over the scarp and ran over the plain to our lines. Lieut. Fallon of the 103d, who was desperately wounded, was caught by his sling belt in a log and thought to die there; however, I said to my grenadier friend: 'Jack, my boy, put your arm over

my neck and I will take you round the waist and run you into the lines.' The Yankees were then pelting us with grape and musketry. As we jogged on I saw an officer carried on his back in some sort of a stretcher and I said to the four men, 'Who is that officer?' 'Col. Scott, sir, shot through the head,' where I saw the bullet mark in the noble man's forehead. When I got my friend into the lines, regardless of who was by, in a fit of sorrow I threw my sabre down exclaiming, 'This is a disgraceful day for Old England!' Col. M—, who heard me, said, 'For shame, Mr. Le Couteur! The men are sufficiently discouraged by defeat.' Col. Pearson said, 'Don't blame him. It is the high feeling of a young soldier.' To my surprise the Commander-in-chief, Sir Gordon Drummond, had heard all this as he was close behind and he asked me, 'Where is Col. Scott?' 'Oh! Sir! He is killed, just being brought in by his men.' 'Where is Col. Drummond?' 'Alas! Sir! He is killed too. Bayoneted.' And I burst into tears at the loss of my beloved commander and three parts of my men. \* \* \* Poor Drummond's body remained in the American lines, blown up. Col. Scott received a soldier's funeral—a most amiable and gallant soldier; indeed, there were no two more heroic men in our army."

General Drummond, who had decided ability for evading responsibility, attributed the defeat to the cowardice of the troops in Fischer's column, at the same time, as was his custom, praising the conduct of the officers. But the great loss the troops sustained of itself showed their bravery, and Sir George Prevost gently reproves Drummond for depriving the soldiers of their flints and for ordering a night attack. The preparedness of our forces and the precautions taken by Gaines account for the decisive defeat we administered. Our comparatively small loss was due to the fact that our fire could not be returned to any great extent, as the enemy's muskets were disabled, and to the fact that we were behind fortifications, although the British speak of the bravery of our troops. We lost two brave and capable officers,

Captain Williams and Lieutenant McDonough. Six subalterns were severely wounded. Fontaine was blown up in the explosion and captured by the Indians, who promptly relieved him of his money and valuables but otherwise treated him kindly, which prompted the grim remark of Brown, that "It would seem, then, that these savages had not joined in the resolution to give no quarter."

After the assault the garrison settled down to the wearisome life of the besieged, only enlivened by a skirmish between pickets or an occasional shell from the enemy. Fatigue parties were constantly at work repairing the damage done to the bastion and works during the assault and by the shells of the enemy.\* These fatigue parties suffered severely in the prosecution of the work. Lieutenant Douglass is authority for the statement that the daily losses averaged one to every sixteen men at work, for the enemy's artillery fired nearly two hundred shots each day, mostly round shot. The fire from Battery Number Two was directed against the works, while that of Number One was used to annoy and injure the garrison. Indeed, it is stated by one of the survivors that the thirty days following the assault was the most trying period of the siege. Men were continually falling; fatigue work around the garrison was incessant, and, as we have seen, extremely dangerous. One third of the force was continually on duty. The others, at night, slept upon their muskets, with bayonets fixed, prepared to resist the assault which might come at any time. Douglass says:

"On the 2nd of August my own little battery though not quite finished was platformed and the guns mounted. I made my bed on the platform that night; and for many weeks afterwards took no rest except on the trailed handspikes of one of the guns with an old tent spread upon them and wrapped in a horse-man's coat."

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\* A large number of pikes were picked up or taken from the British during the assault on the fifteenth, and rejected bayonets were fastened to poles. These, being as long as the parapet was thick, were laid every evening at intervals along the parapet for use in the event of an escalade, and it was thought they would be of great assistance in repelling an attack.

As matters stood in this wise, it is not strange that the nerves of the strongest men became unstrung and that some seventy of the weaker sort deserted from the American forces.

An Irishman, a subaltern in the Eleventh Infantry, upon returning to his tent from fatigue work discovered that a round shot had taken the tail completely off from his uniform coat. Taking it by the collar he proudly showed it to his brother officers, saying he had had a narrow escape, as he had thought of putting on that very coat that morning.

Many acts of gallantry occurred during this period. Colonel Brooke (then a major), while officer of the day, with two men, stole out of the fort with a lantern concealed in a watch coat, and, proceeding through the enemy's line of sentinels, affixed the lantern in a tree directly in line between the fort and Battery Number Three, then in process of construction. A cord was attached to the coat, by means of which the coat was pulled off the lantern when the colonel and his men reached the end of the cord. *The Boston Patriot*, referring to this exploit, says:

"The American batteries, directed by the light of the lantern in the tree, opened their fire upon the unsuspecting workmen, who could not divine what secret spirit had betrayed the position of their laborers until they observed the light swinging in the air nor then could form any conjecture by what daring hand it had been there suspended."

The British, by reason of the severe losses which they had sustained, awaited reinforcements from York (now Toronto), and occupied their forces meantime in planting guns in Battery Number Three, situated only about five hundred and fifty yards from our works. From this new battery great things were expected.

Minor fights took place almost daily between the lines. On the twentieth of August one of these skirmishes apparently occurred, for General Drummond, in a matter-of-fact way, writes to the governor of Canada, August twenty-first, that "*From the number*



*of scalps that were taken by the Indians and the number of dead and wounded which were seen carried into the Fort, the enemy must have lost 40 or 50 men in this affair."*

On the twenty-eighth of August, while Gaines was lying down in his quarters, a shell crashed into the room through the roof, and, exploding, injured him so severely that he was obliged to turn the command over to Ripley. When Brown heard of Gaines's injury, although not fully recovered from the wound received at Lundy's Lane, he hastened to Fort Erie, and, after a few days, assumed command, which he retained as long as the siege lasted.

On the twenty-fifth of August and the fifth of September there were quite severe skirmishes, in which the Americans drove the English into their works and in which each side displayed great gallantry. In fact, Ripley issued a general order on the affair of the fifth, congratulating the participants upon their gallantry.

On the seventh of September the enemy detached a force, and, moving out at daylight, surprised our Picket Number Four, killing fourteen men and capturing seven, the entire advance party, forcing the balance of the picket to retire into the fort with considerable loss.

The enemy during this period was reinforced by the Sixth and the Eighty-second regular regiments, consisting of one thousand and forty men, which just about compensated for the losses during the assault. On the fourth of September the new battery was completed. It mounted three twenty-four-pounders, an eight-inch howitzer, and a mortar,—a formidable armament for that period, when the effective range of a fieldpiece about equaled the point-blank range of the modern rifle.

The official despatches at this period of the siege reveal the fact that both sides were becoming extremely apprehensive over their respective situations. The Americans had burned the mills and destroyed the stores in all this part of Canada. Winter was coming on, and not only were the English far from their



base of supplies but there seemed to be small prospect of a further supply reaching them at all. Then, too, ammunition was running so low it had to be husbanded, and Drummond's army was threatened with an epidemic of typhus and typhoid fevers. Our forces were so greatly weakened by long and severe fighting that on September tenth we could muster only about two thousand men for field duty, although more were able to do duty within the fort. In addition, the garrison was subsisted on salt meat and stale bread, as fresh meat and vegetables were so high in price and hard to get that they were beyond reach of the majority of the men.

In response to the urgent appeals of Gaines and Brown, volunteers were called for, and the militia of western New York was ordered out by Governor Tompkins. These men were directed to assemble at Buffalo, which they did in considerable numbers from all the western part of the state. Porter called a meeting of the officers, and after a sharp talk ascertained that nearly all would volunteer to cross the river, although at first few would go. The men were then addressed by Porter in an eloquent speech, and nearly one thousand five hundred were persuaded to volunteer—about half the number assembled.

Dorsheimer, in an interesting paper entitled *Buffalo during the War of 1812*, contained in the first volume of the publications of the Buffalo Historical Society, relates the following:

Porter formed his column at what is now the corner of Niagara and Pearl streets. When the command to move off was given, and it was apparent the line of march was towards Black Rock, a lawyer—probably not from Buffalo,—“who,” says Dorsheimer, “in such times are scrupulous as to the law in proportion to the value they set upon their lives, stepped out of the ranks and shouted out, ‘We are militia of New York and cannot be ordered out of the state. It is unconstitutional.’ It was wonderful how suddenly a love for the constitution developed itself in the breasts of the militiamen. Large numbers left the ranks and began to clamor against the order. But Porter and a

few determined officers spurred among the malcontents, arrested the ringleader, awed his followers, and, aided by a small detachment of regulars, restored order." The refractory jurist was hustled into a wagon and sent under arrest to Williamsville with the information that if he ever returned to Buffalo he would be shot without benefit of clergy.

The force then moved off without further trouble, crossed the river, and camped on the lake shore to the left of Towson's battery, throwing up a sod breastwork for protection. This occurred on September tenth. Their arrival was not hailed with great enthusiasm by the regular army contingent of the garrison, whose confidence in militia seems to have been somewhat shaken. But these same troops, ununiformed, and poorly drilled and equipped, soon showed that if they could not drill they could fight; and by their gallant conduct they did more than their share toward redeeming the reputation of the American militiaman during this war.

The monthly return of our forces on August thirty-first, 1814, was as follows:

	Present for Duty.		Aggregate Present and Absent.
	N. C. O. and Privates.	Officers.	
Dragoons,	27	1	48
Bombardiers, etc.,	34		51
Artillery Corps,	206	10	369
First Brigade,	725	39	2,311
Second Brigade,	698	42	1,646
Porter's Brigade,	220	16	599
First and Fourth Rifles,	217	11	504
Total,	2,127	119	5,528

## CHAPTER VII.

*The Sortie.*

A brilliant achievement—the only instance in history where a besieging army was entirely broken up and routed by a single sortie.—*Sir William Napier.*

Although the Americans had received reinforcements, their position was still regarded as critical. Battery Number Three, mounting the long twenty-four-pounders, had not as yet opened fire; but we had suffered quite severely from the fire of Number One and Number Two, and the new battery was much feared by Brown because it would rake our position. The spirits of the men were sinking under the long and constant strain and confinement, and, to make matters worse, the weather was bad, much rain falling. Brown, therefore, determined to risk a sortie, damage the enemy's works as much as possible without too severe a loss to himself, and then retreat upon the fort.

It will be remembered that the works of the enemy were occupied by only one brigade of the enemy, each of his three brigades alternating in this duty, while the balance of the army remained in camp, nearly two miles away through the woods. Brown's plan, briefly stated, was as follows:

Porter, with a force of about one thousand six hundred, composed of regulars, militia, and Indians, was to move out from the left, make a wide detour, strike into the woods, and, following roads prepared in advance, come upon the enemy's right at Battery Number Three, and, after crushing the right and spiking the guns of the battery, to turn towards the center and assist in the capture of batteries Number Two and Number One. Colonel Miller, "for whom batteries had no terrors," with five hundred men from the Ninth, Eleventh, and Nineteenth regiments of regulars, was to take up a position in a ravine formed by a water-course running into the lake, situate some three hundred yards

southerly from the enemy's line, and, when the noise of Porter's attack was heard, to rush in between batteries Number Two and Number Three, and attack Battery Number Two and then Number One. General Ripley, who, it is claimed, had no confidence in the success of the enterprise, and, as Brown states, wished to take no part in it, was stationed with the Twenty-first Regiment as a reserve out of sight between the westerly bastions of the fort. Major Jessup, recently wounded, was left to garrison the fort with the Twenty-fifth Regiment, only one hundred and fifty strong. The plan of attack was simple, and, if success is any criterion, extremely effective.

On September sixteenth Lieutenants Frazer and Riddle, with one hundred men each, fifty armed with muskets and fifty with axes, labored all day without being discovered, constructing rough roads for Porter's columns up to within one hundred and fifty yards of the British position. They also built underbrush roads back to the fort from a point near the front of the British position in order that the retreat might be unobstructed and the miry and impassable places avoided. Much rain had fallen during the past twelve days, and the ground in front of our position was little better than a swamp.

The morning of the seventeenth dawned cloudy and disagreeable, and a light rain was falling. During the forenoon the volunteers were paraded, and, after arousing their enthusiasm by the announcement of the recent American victories at Plattsburg and Lake Champlain, the plan of the proposed sortie was revealed to them. It was enthusiastically received. Each volunteer was thereupon directed to take off his headgear and tie a red handkerchief or red cloth around his head so that he might be readily distinguished, none of them being uniformed. As the day wore on the rain increased, and a hard thunderstorm, almost a gale, came up, which continued during the attack. This undoubtedly aided our forces in advancing unperceived to the attack until right onto the enemy's works, but many of our muskets were disabled through water getting into the pans of the guns.

In the afternoon Porter moved out to take up his position on the enemy's right. He sent forward as an advance two hundred riflemen, with some Indians, under Colonel Gibson. The balance of his force was divided into two columns, which marched parallel to each other, following the brush roads. They were guided respectively by Riddle and Frazer. Lieutenant Colonel Wood commanded the right column, which was composed of four hundred regulars and five hundred militia. These troops were to attack the enemy's position. Brigadier General Davis, of Batavia, who, while senior to Porter, volunteered to muster his brigade and fight under him, waiving all question of rank, commanded the left column consisting of five hundred militia newly raised. This column was intended to engage the enemy's reinforcements if any should be thrown in.

These columns reached their position a few yards from the right of the enemy's position without discovery, and at about three in the afternoon Brown gave Porter the order to attack. This order was executed with great vigor, and the cheers of the Americans as they rushed to the assault were plainly heard by the anxious listeners upon the American shore, notwithstanding the storm that raged.

The British lines that day were guarded by the Second Brigade, consisting of the Eighth and De Watteville's regiments of regulars. The swiftness of the attack utterly surprised these troops, and the Americans soon captured a blockhouse in the rear of Battery Number Three, and then the battery itself, destroying the much dreaded twenty-four-pounders and their carriages and blowing up a magazine. Here the brave Wood\* and Brigadier General Davis fell mortally wounded. The loss of both of these men was greatly mourned.

Porter then swung his forces around and attacked Battery Number Two conjointly with Major Miller, who had rushed forward as soon as Porter's attack was heard. After a sharp struggle

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\* In the cemetery at West Point, a short distance from the grave of General Scott, stands a cenotaph erected by General Brown to the memory of Lieutenant Colonel Wood. It was dedicated in 1818, and the inscription states that he fell while leading a charge at the sortie of Fort Erie, September seventeenth, 1814, in the thirty-first year of his age.

this battery was captured. Battery Number One was, so Brown says, abandoned by the enemy. At all events, it was captured; but by reason of the confusion, and the stout defense the British soon made, the Americans neglected or were unable to permanently injure batteries Number One and Number Two, although they were temporarily disabled.

Owing to the suddenness and impetuosity of the American attack, the Second Brigade of the enemy was crumpled up and driven away before any arrangements could be made to meet the attack. It is a maxim of war that "when a force is not deployed but is struck suddenly and violently on its flank, resistance is impracticable." Chancellorsville, where the Eleventh Corps of the Union army melted away before Jackson's fierce onslaught, was an illustration of the truth of this maxim. This attack was another; and our troops soon swept the front line of intrenchments almost clear of the enemy.

So far the Americans had accomplished much with little loss, but the end was not yet. As soon as the American attack was heard, De Watteville promptly sent back to the British camp for reinforcements, and the First and Third brigades hastened to the succor of the Second Brigade. In the meantime the Second Brigade was rapidly recovering from the demoralization from which it had at first suffered.

The British lines were defended by felled trees, entanglements, and abattis, and whilst the Americans were struggling to penetrate these defenses they were met with a hot fire from the enemy posted in the traverses and along the parallel lines of intrenchments. Then too, at this stage of the attack the enemy's reinforcements arrived and commenced a determined resistance to the further advance of the Americans. The fight now raged furiously. Hand-to-hand encounters occurred all along the line, and sometimes with the bayonet and sometimes with rifle fire the enemy sought to regain possession of the lines and drive off the Americans, now somewhat confused by the constant fire concentrated upon them from all points and through penetrating the



abattis and entanglements. Although outnumbered, the Americans stubbornly resisted, and, regardless of the hot fire, gave back blow for blow.

Brown, fearing for Miller's safety, ordered Ripley forward to his assistance, who promptly advanced with the Twenty-first Infantry. Ripley soon received a serious wound in the neck, and was borne to the rear.\*

Miller, with excellent judgment, appreciating that nothing further could be accomplished, and in view of the superior force of the British, began an orderly retreat towards the fort; and Brown soon ordered the other columns to do the same, for the object of the sortie had been accomplished. They all reached the fort in good order, but with considerable loss, for by this time the British were pressing them fiercely. Thus in barely two hours the result attempted had been achieved, the enemy irreparably crippled, and one thousand men killed, injured, or taken prisoners.

General Drummond speaks of the retreat of the Americans as a "precipitate retrograde movement made by the enemy from the different points of our position of which he had gained a short possession." It should be observed, however, that Drummond, whatever his faults were as a soldier, was a pronounced success at what might be termed an explanatory writer. Some one has remarked of Cellini that he created his own atmosphere. The same remark applies to Drummond. His despatches to his government are well worth a perusal. Ingersoll, in his history of the war, dryly remarks apropos of this part of Drummond's report:

"The coincident exertions of both commanders, Brown to withdraw his men from, and Drummond with his to recover, the British entrenchments, soon effected it."

In this sortie we lost seventy-nine killed, two hundred and sixteen wounded, and two hundred and sixteen missing, a total of five hundred and eleven. Of this number twelve officers were

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\* Ripley never fully recovered from this wound, although he afterward served a term in Congress.

killed, twenty-two wounded, and ten were missing—a most serious blow to the effectiveness of so small an army.

The enemy's loss in killed, wounded, and missing was somewhat under one thousand, and, according to the American accounts, we captured nearly four hundred prisoners. In any event, the Americans totally disabled his best battery and injured the others, besides destroying the morale of his troops. Only the pen of a Drummond could convert this disaster into a repulse of the Americans, which he did with ease. According to Drummond's report his loss was one hundred and fifteen killed, one hundred and forty-eight wounded, and three hundred and sixteen missing—a total of five hundred and seventy-nine.

During the progress of the fight crowds lined the American shore and listened to the combat during the lulls in the severe storm which raged that afternoon. Dorsheimer thus dramatically describes what was probably a very simple incident:

“All through the afternoon no tidings came. Just at dusk a small boat was seen struggling in the rapids. An eager crowd soon gathered on the beach. In the midst of the breakers the little bark upset. One of its crew was seen floating in the waves. The bystanders made a line by holding on to each other's clothes, and, stretching out from the shore, seized the drowning man. As, exhausted and chilled, he staggered up the beach, he gasped into the ears of his rescuers the first news they had of the great conflict and victory.”

Many friends of General Porter have contended that the sortie was planned by him and that he suggested it to Brown. Brown makes no mention of this in his official report or in his manuscript memoirs. Porter was a man of much more capacity than Brown, and it is quite likely he had to do with planning the attack, although Brown was by no means averse to any plan which would insure fighting. In any event, Porter was selected to lead the most important column, composed partly of regulars not in his brigade, which is a significant fact in Porter's favor.



Holley, at one time secretary to Porter, in an article in volume six of *The Magazine of American History*, says:

"Before battery No. 3 was completed, one bright morning early in September, as General Porter, Lt.-Col. Wood, and Major McRea of the engineers were walking from Towson's battery towards the Fort and discussing the progress of the enemy's offensive operations, Lt.-Col. Wood half-jestingly suggested that it might be expedient to attempt a sortie. But no serious proposal of such an enterprise was made until some days later, when General Porter invited his two friends to his quarters to examine a plan for it which he had prepared. This plan was discussed and fully matured in several confidential meetings of the three officers. It was then submitted to General Brown, who was still at Buffalo, whither he had retired, as has been stated, after being wounded at the battle of Lundy's Lane. He neither encouraged nor discouraged it at the outset, but, on examination of it as thoroughly as possible in his absence from the ground, he rather objected to the project.

"General Porter, however, continued to urge it, and his views were warmly seconded by the two able engineers to whom he had fully explained his plan. The whole army, General Brown included, reposed the greatest confidence in these two officers, particularly in Lt.-Col. Wood.

"General Brown finally required General Porter, whom he considered responsible for the plan, to give him a written statement of its details over his own signature. After receiving this document General Brown consented that the enterprise should be undertaken, and directed General Porter to lead it."

On the other hand, Major Jessup, at that time serving in the garrison, states positively that the sortie was planned solely by Brown; and he was certainly in a position to be well informed as to what transpired in the little garrison. Major General Brown was in command, and as he assumed the responsibility for the movement he is entitled to the credit of its success.

An incident during the sortie, in which General Porter was the hero, is worth repeating. General Porter, so the story runs, while accompanied only by his orderly, was proceeding between batteries Number One and Number Two, when, too late to retreat, he suddenly came upon a small company of the enemy standing at ease apparently waiting orders. Coming up as though at the head of a regiment, Porter cried, "That's right, my good fellows, surrender, and we'll take good care of you." The ruse succeeded, and man by man the company from right to left threw down their arms and marched to the rear. Everything went well until the man next to the left guide was reached, who, not seeing any soldiers supporting Porter, and suspecting the trick, came to charge bayonet and demanded that Porter surrender. The boot was now on the other leg, but Porter dextrously seized the musket and endeavored to wrest it away from the soldier. Several comrades came to the man's assistance, and in the *mêlée* Porter was thrown down and wounded in the hand. Struggling to his feet, he told his assailants they were surrounded and if they did not cease their resistance he would put them to death. This created a slight diversion, and at this juncture Lieutenant Chatfield, of the militia, at the head of the Cayuga Rifles, came up, thus relieving Porter of an embarrassing situation and securing the prisoners as well. This story smacks of the political campaign more than of the particular campaign with which this narrative deals, but it may be true. In any event, Porter, in his official report, mentions Chatfield as one "by whose intrepidity I was, during the action, extricated from the most *unpleasant* situation."

On the twenty-first Drummond in great haste retired to the old position of the British at Chippewa Creek, leaving some of his stores at Fort Erie and destroying others at Frenchman's Creek. The raising of the siege showed how severely Drummond felt the sortie if his reports do not. It practically closed the campaign upon the Niagara frontier, which since July third, 1814, had waged with great fierceness.

The following table of losses is interesting, although it should be remembered it does not include the losses in skirmishes and minor combats, which were constantly taking place. It is taken from General Wright's *Life of Scott*, and differs very slightly from the figures already given.

	Total British Loss.	Total American Loss.
Battle of Chippewa, July fifth, 1814,	507	328
Battle of Niagara (Lundy's Lane), July twenty-fifth, 1814,	878	860
Battle of Fort Erie, August fifteenth, 1814,	905	84
Sortie at Fort Erie, September seventeenth, 1814,	800	511
Total,	3,090	1,783

When we consider that neither side had over four thousand, if that number of men, engaged at any time, the immense percentage of loss will be appreciated.

General James Miller, writing two days after the sortie, says:

"I was ordered to advance and get into the enemy's works before the column had beaten the enemy sufficiently to meet us at the batteries. We had no alternative but to fall on them, beat them, and take them. It was a sore job for us. My command consisted of the 9th, 11th, and 19th Regiments. Colonel Aspinwall commanded the 9th and 19th and Colonel Bedel the 11th. Colonel Aspinwall lost his left arm, Major Trimble of the 19th was severely, I believe mortally, wounded through the body. Captain Hale of the 11th killed; Captain Ingersoll of the 9th wounded in the head, and eight other officers severely wounded some of them mortally. Colonel Bedel was the only officer higher than a lieutenant in my whole command but what was killed or wounded."

After Drummond left our front the fort was garrisoned with a small force; and the volunteers, who were praised on all sides for their steadiness and bravery during the whole campaign, and especially the sortie, were dismissed to their homes. General

Brown put the matter in a few words when he said in a letter to Governor Tompkins, "The militia of New York have redeemed their character—they behaved gallantly."

The raising of the siege was completely decisive, and the pioneers along the frontier could again rest in peace without the disturbing thought that they might be scalped or burned out, or both, before another day dawned. The fort was occupied until November fifth, 1814, when it was blown up and destroyed and the stores and garrison withdrawn to Buffalo, its possession being no longer of value.

The War of 1812 has been overshadowed by the more important events which preceded and followed it, but when an adequate history of this trying period of our country's history is written, and the battles along the Niagara frontier are recounted, Chippewa, Lundy's Lane, and Fort Erie will be awarded places high up in the record of the many valorous deeds the history of our country affords. And while the history of our brave men is written, let due praise be accorded to our former foes, who, through the mutation of time and circumstance, are now our nearest neighbors and best friends.

THE END.

















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